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IBADAN CHAPTER

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE IMPLEMENTING
AND FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES OF MAJOR UN
CONFERENCES IN NIGERIA

PROCEEDINGS

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Violence Against Women: A Recurring International and Criminological Problem

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INTRODUCTION

Women all over the world have a lot of things in common. In spite of geographical, developmental, cultural and social differences, and diversity in experiences and social status, violence against women is a common phenomenon and worldwide problem. Such violence is the ultimate form of discrimination in a world that discriminates against women and it is increasingly attracting attention all over the world as a development question. The manifestation is not restricted to any particular part of the world, but it is prevalent in Africa because of the unyielding cultural and stereotype attitude

Violence against women cuts across socio-economic, racial, ethnic and religious barriers. It does not discriminate between its victims and it is a myth perpetuated by the middle and higher class, because the environmental circumstances of such classes, hide a lot of violence to women within the class from the public. Although it is a daily experience in many societies but not much is known about the problem. This may be attributed to many reasons which include the reluctance of the majority of women to disclose any violence they are subject to for fear of reprisal from their spouses or the society at large. Furthermore, in certain cases, women that are abused do not know the magnitude of the problem, because culturally women have been groomed to see violence against them as a normal way of life. Moreover, in the past years, women issues were considered as unimportant.

The problem therefore is that researchers in this area have difficulty in gathering data and there are only a few literature from scholars all over the world on this critical issue. It was not therefore surprising that in 1986, when the first seminar on data requirement on women studies was held in Nigeria, the Federal

Office of Statistics in Lagos, had very insignificant information on the problems of women.

A change occurred worldwide in the first quarter of the twentieth century. This change is a revolution with a difference. The "revolution" was in connection with women issues. This "revolution" was without arms and bloodshed. It was universal in scope, peaceful in nature, lawful in approach and victorious in outcome. The goals when fully realized will overcome centuries of violence against women and will significantly enhance the world development and prosperity.

Gone are the days, when there was a deafening silence when women issues were raised. This change in attitude at the initial stage, was not due to any other reason, but to the spirited dedication of women and the camaraderie exhibited by women on a global level. The results of such dedication, are becoming obvious, especially with the number of International Conferences that are being held all over the world where women issues are receiving such tremendous attention. Specifically, on the issues of violence against women, there is now a universal consensus against such acts. Globally, it is now accepted, that where women prosper, the country prospers, and certain facts have emerged from this. The facts are that lack of women's access to education, health care and economic opportunities result in children being less educated, malnourished, families larger and poorer, the environment poorly managed and less development in any nation. It is apparent that eliminating violence against women and removing all cultural and social practices that encourage violence against women are vital to the development of a nation. It is how a non-controversial issue that women's equality is a human right. In 1945, the United Nations Charter gave women the global platform needed and the legal basis for reforms. Since then, the issue of violence against women has been a recurring issue. It is seen as a health issue and at the same time a violation of their human right. Significantly, in the mid 1970's, efforts were made and intensified to elevate women to their proper position. The year 1975, was proclaimed International Women's Year, and this

same year, the first world conference on women was held in Mexico. In 1980, the second world women's conference was held in Copenhagen and in 1981, the United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women came into force. 1976 - 1985 was a significant period that the General Assembly of the United Nations declared as the Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. Another important event at this time was the Nairobi World Conference in July 1985, organised to review and appraisal the achievement of the United Nations Decade for women and at the end of the conference a document. "This Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women" was endorsed. Paragraph 288 of the document called on States to increase public awareness of violence against women as a societal problem and to establish policies and legislative measures to ascertain its causes and prevent and eliminate such violence. Moreover, States were called upon to establish and strengthen forms of assistance to victims of violence through the provision of shelter, support, legal and other services. All these conferences and activities of women between 1975 and 1985 and thereafter, and the cries from different women organisations all over the world, brought about great awareness to the magnitude of violence against women.

In the first mid decade of 1990, there was a reinforcement of efforts of all groups on issues relating to violence. During this period, women from all over the world came together at some major United Nations Conferences from New York in 1990 to Beijing in 1995, governments of the various nations have come to realise and acknowledge that equality and empowerment of women are prerequisite for sustainable human development and that one of the ways of achieving this is the total elimination of violence against women.

This paper analyses the forms, causes, effects and setbacks of violence against women and examines some of the major United Nations Conferences held between 1990 and 1995 which have relevance to violence against women. Ways by which the documents adopted at these conferences can be effectively

implemented and monitored are discussed. Finally, this paper highlights strategies to eliminate violence against women.

Violence Against Women: An Overview

The word violence is a broad and relative term. Simply put, violence is any unjust or unwarranted exertion of force or power against a person. It could be physical, psychological or sexual. Tamuno (1991) defines violence as the unnecessary use of threat. Domenach (1978) defines violence from a broad perspective as the use of force whether overt or covert in order to wrest from individuals or groups something that they are not disposed to give of their own freewill. Mackenzie (1975) says violence is the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or cause damage to persons or property action or conduct characterized by this, and treatment or usage tending to cause bodily injury or forcibly interfering with personal freedom. The emphasis in this paper is on individual or interpersonal violence against women as opposed to group violence. Individual violence in this sense consist of such violent acts as murder, rape assault and defilement. In the Declaration on the elimination of violence against women, it is said that the term violence against women include any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life. Violence can be viewed from different perspectives, it is a crucial social mechanism by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. From the development stance, violence against women is marginalizing women and keeping them below optimum level of fulfillment or generally gender exploitation or discrimination against women (Boulding, 1975). This will include all elements of patriarchy and other institutional structures that victimize women.

The little literature available on violence against women in certain cases, have deviated from the main issue. This is buttressed by a statement made on violence against women, that

such violence can be constructive or destructive and that it is absurd to condemn all forms of violence (Gur, 1970; Domenarch, 1978). Without joining in this debate, it is submitted that as it relates to women, this argument is untenable and unacceptable. To extol violence in this regard is criminal.

Violence against women are in many forms. Violence may occur in the family and may occur in the community, it could be physical, psychological or sexual. Physical or psychological violence may be as a result of assault on the body of a woman, problems in widowhood or inheritance practices in some parts of Nigeria. In many cases, sexual violence results in physical or psychological violence. Violence occurring in the family include rape, marital rape, forced marriage, genital manipulation, harmful traditional practices, wife battery and all forms of domesticated violence where the woman is blackmailed, manipulated and abused privately. On the other hand, physical, sexual or psychological violence occurring in the general community include rape sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work or institution. The sad truth is that in many societies, Nigeria inclusive, violence against women is not only conveniently ignored, but at times sanctioned by law.

In Nigeria, under the Penal Code (1990) which is applicable in the Northern States of Nigeria, a husband is permitted to chastise the wife as long as it does not amount to grievous harm. This permission is given to the husband where the husband and wife are subject to a native law and custom that recognised such correction as lawful. In defining what would amount to bodily grievous harm, the inhuman part of the provision is made clearer. Section 241 of the Penal Code provides that bodily grievous harm amounts to other acts such as permanent deprivation of the right of eyes, hearing or power of speech, disfiguration of the head or face, or hurt which causes the woman to be during a space of twenty days in severe bodily pain or unable to follow her ordinary pursuits. No doubt, such acts amount to wife battery. The issue of wife battery has witnessed a marked increase over the years in Nigeria. More often, it is

realized that until grievous bodily harm is inflicted and possible death, results, the law enforcement agents are not willing to assist a battered woman. It is unfortunate that until a wife is battered to a particular state no attention is given by the law and the society and this is merely regarded as a family issue. In recent times, national newspapers in Nigeria have carried news of women who have been battered or abused by their spouses. On Saturday, 6th May 1995, the Nigerian Tribune had a story of a man who poured acid on his wife and daughter. Similarly, there was a report captioned "Hubby kills wife for seeking divorce" in the Nigerian Tribune of Tuesday, May 2, 1995. The story had it that the man who was angry because his wife had sued for divorce beat her up and she died. Another story of wife battery was reported in the Sunday Vanguard of March 12, 1995 where a 40 year old farmer beat his wife to a state of unconsciousness and she died some days later from the injuries sustained. These incidents are just a few of the many violence inflicted against women.

The criminal code (1990) applicable in Southern Nigeria, recognises marital rape as legal unlike in England where marital rape is an offence (RVR (Husband, 1991). In India, wife burning is permitted under certain customs and in Uganda, wife beating is customary. Such violence sanctioned by law, are legacies of the perception that women are the property of men.

In Nigeria, there are many ethnic groups with different cultures. There are some cultural practices which reinforces violence against the woman. One of such is found in widowhood practices in some cultures. There are remarkable differences between widowhood rites for men and women in Nigeria. In many cases, this is a time of double sadness for a woman. Apart from the loss of a loved one, the suffering that such women are made to undergo are rigorous, demoralizing and dehumanising. Some widows have their heads shaved, are made to lie down on the dirty floor, or are made to drink the water used to wash their husbands corpse. Most widowhood practices do physical and psychological harm to women. Another common act of violence

against women in Nigeria, which is as a result of cultural practice is the practice of early child marriage. In many cases, early marriage practice brings about physical and sexual violence on the female body. In most cases, the body at this time is not physiologically and psychologically matured for acts of forced sexual intercourse. Forced pregnancies resulting from such acts are usually carried under hazardous conditions. Labour in such cases are very painful and long because of the immature structure of the body of the mother. Where the young mother survives this agony, this act of violence may cause a disease known as Vesico Varginal Fistulae (VVF). Another common traditional practice which amounts to violence against the woman is the practice of female genital mutilation. This refers to the practice that involves cutting the female genital. Apart from the painful hazardous procedure without anaesthesia or regard for hygienic safety, because exclusion is often performed without sterilized instruments, consequences include hemorrhage, tetanus, infection, obstructed labour, infertility or death.

Causes

To eliminate violence against women in Nigeria and for effective monitoring and implementation of the different programmes of action, the causes of violence against women must be examined.

Violence against women is multicausal. According to Obateru (1994), a study carried out by Anifowose show that there is no single cause for violence against women and that the true fact is that usually there are multiple causes. For instance, the issue of poverty has direct and indirect influence on sexual violence in the home. Studies have also shown that sexual violence are related to overcrowding and inadequate accommodation arrangement (Udegbe and Omololu, 1994). Other factors which cause violence against women are traditional beliefs, customs and practices of certain societies. Violence against women is exacerbated by social pressure, lack of access to legal information, aid, protection, lack of laws that effectively prohibit

violence against women, failure to reform existing laws, lack of awareness and lack of enforcement of existing laws. Furthermore, inadequate documentation and research on domestic violence impede effort to design specific intervention strategies.

Some of the causes of violence against women, can be traced back into history. There is an old adage that says "A dog a wife and a walnut; the more you beat them, the better they be" (Davidson, 1977). Blackstone in his commentaries of laws of England 1775, stated that the husband was empowered to correct his wife in the same way that he is allowed to correct his apprentice. Historical works in Nigeria, suggest that early child marriage was popular in Northern Nigeria (and it is still very common) as a result of Islamic revolution of the 19th Century in this region, which was to protect premarital sex among Hausa - Fulani girls. In England, under the common law, a husband was allowed to have sexual intercourse with the wife without her consent. This was the position of the law in England until the case of *R v R* (Husband, 1991). Though, the Nigerian Criminal law is to a large extent based on the English law, the position of the law in this regard remains unchanged. All these factors which causes violence against women, can be attributed to the patriarchal view held in the past and presently in some societies that woman is not a grown human being with a mind of her own and should be treated the same way a child is treated - violently acted against sometimes through beating, and enforced submission. Moreover, this attitude is based on the view that the woman is the property of her husband and can be toyed with.

One persisting cause of violence against women in Nigeria is the attitude of the law environment agents, the society generally and women themselves. Cases of violence against women made known to such agencies or family members are often times trivialized or regarded as domestic matters, or as shameful to be made known to the public. In other cases, wives are not willing to report or testify against their husbands. The tacit condonation of domestic violence against women is found in a Yoruba adage that say "*Ile oko, ile eko*" literally interpreted means "the matrimonial

home for a woman is a school". All these acts of violence are not without efforts on the woman.

Effects

Studies have shown that violence against women have a multiplier effect on the total violence in the society (Ronvoize, 1979; Scott, 1974). In all the types of violence against women discussed above, the consequences may be physical, which in most cases are visible and cannot be ignored. These include disfiguration of certain parts of the body, permanent physical injury and miscarriages. Generally, violence against women disrupt women's lives, denies them options, undermines their confidence and sense of self esteem, it destroys women's health, denies their human right and undermines their full participation in the society. In addition, violence against women may have physical consequences which in most cases are visible and cannot be ignored. This include disfiguration of certain parts of the body, miscarriage, permanent injury, feat of subsequent attacks and in some cases death as seen above. Sexual violence against women, apart from the effects above may result to physical or psychological damages such as unwanted pregnancy, incurable diseases such as AIDS and social stigma. It is worthy of note, that where the effect of violence, keeps a woman from participating in a development project, or force is used to deprive her of earning, or fear of sexual assault prevents her from taking a job; development cannot take place. All the above mentioned effects of violence against women, are obstacles to economic social development of women and to sustainable development of a country.

Setbacks

There is still a dearth of the knowledge available on violence against women. Available research in such an intensely personal and private area of human relationship is difficult. The data available are not adequate to show the level of violence against women. This makes it difficult to plan, articulate and

implement policies towards a lasting solution. Most of the data available are from Europe and America and there is little from Africa, though, such violence is prevalent for reasons discussed above. All these facts have caused a set back in addressing the issue of violence against women.

Violence Against Women: The Outcome of the United Nations Conferences (1990-1995)

Over the past five years; many important conferences were organized by the United Nations which have relevance to the development of the status of women. Many common themes can be identified from the programmes of action endorsed at the end of such conferences, but the pertinent one which relates to this paper is the issue of violence against women. Eight major conferences were organized by the United Nations between 1990-1995, however, emphasis would be on a few that has direct relevance to violence against women.

World Summit for Children

This conference was the first major one organised by the United Nations in the 1990's. The conference was held in New York in September 1990. The document endorsed at the end of the conference is the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in 1990's. All over the world, the girl child in particular is the child whose life and body are at risk. In countries of every economic and social profile, gender inequity works against the girl child. As it has now been recognised, the rights of a girl child are inseparable from the rights of an adult woman. Therefore, if women are regarded as socially inferior beings, then the girl child too would be so regarded. One of the many tasks before states that endorsed this document is to strengthen the role of women in general by giving the girl child equal treatment and opportunities from the beginning of life. As such, acts which amounts to violence on the girl-child as discussed

earlier which ultimately may affect her as a woman, preventing her from reaching full potentials for sustainable development must be prevented. Such acts or practices include early marriage, early child bearing, female genital mutilation. The protection given to the girl-child in this document, protecting her from all types of violence has great relevance to the issue of the totality of violence against women. When violence is nipped in the bud at the earliest stage of the life of the girl-child, it has an overall effect on her ability later on in life, to contribute to the maximum in the future development of the nation.

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)

The UNCED was held between 3rd and 14th June, 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. The conference tagged "Earth Summit" endorsed a document known as Agenda 21 and a comprehensive programme of action known as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Agenda 21 extensively incorporates activities for strengthening the role of women in sustainable development and Principle 20 of Rio Declaration states that women have a vital role to play in environmental management and development.

Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 contains specific recommendation to eliminate all obstacles to women's equal and beneficial participation amongst several other issues. Violence against women is one of such obstacles. This chapter titled "Global Action for Women Toward Sustainable and Equitable Development" is policy and management oriented. In particular, Section 24: 2h enjoins governments to consider adopting and enforcing legislations prohibiting violence against women and to take all administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate violence against women in all its forms. Section 24:4 urged government to rectify all relevant conventions pertaining to women and ensure the enforcement and translation of such conventions into domestic laws. The issue of violence against women was seen as being central to development and has an

effect on production ability. It is recognised, that if women are to fully participate in sustainable development and properly manage the environment, they must be physically, emotionally and psychologically stable, if the consensus is that where women prosper a country prosper, the magnitude of violence against women in Nigeria makes it mandatory that the government must quickly address the issue. In Africa, women grow and process eighty per cent of the food consumed (Boserup, 1970), they are the principal household managers and the dominant force in many sectors of the informal market economy, it is therefore important to eliminate any form of violence against them, which will affect their input to development.

World Conference on Human Right

The World Conference on Human Right (WCHR) was held on the 25th of June, 1993 in Vienna Austria. Amongst other matters, issues relating to violence against women received great attention. It was made clear at the end of the conference, that violence against women can no longer be ignored and that in all its pervasive forms, it is manifested at the cultural, social and political levels. The document adopted at the end of the WCIR is the Vienna Declaration. Violence against women are deeply discussed in the declaration. In preambular 7 bis of the document, (1993), the States expressed their deep concern about the various forms of discrimination and violence to which women continue to be exposed to, all over the world. This conference changed the world perception that violence against women is not just an issue of gender, but that it is incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person (A Conf. 157/24 Part 1). The declaration further states that gender based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation resulting from cultural prejudices must be eliminated (Part II, Paragraph 9). Other crucial areas of violence against women which were condemned are systematic rape and armed conflict. There was a call, that all perpetrators of such crimes should be punished and that a stop should be put to the practice. In addition, States were called upon to strictly

observe humanitarian laws as set out by the Geneva Convention of 1949. In paragraph 2, Part III it was stressed that it is important to work towards the elimination of violence against women in public and private life, eliminate all forms of sexual harassment, gender bias in the administration of justice and eradicate any conflict which may arise between the rights of the women and the harmful effect of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism. In December 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations pursuant to the Declaration proclaimed the Declaration on the Elimination of violence against women (Resolution 48/104, 1993). In June 1994, the Commission on Human Right appointed the first special rapporteur on violence against women pursuant to a decision taken at the WCHR.

International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)

The ICPD was convened in Cairo, Egypt between September 3 and 5, 1994. The conference provided an opportunity for women all over the world to effectively advocate for policies to empower women and promote gender equity. The document endorsed at the end of the conference is the ICPD programme of action which is significant for its practicality. According to Nafis Sadik 1994, the General Secretary of the Conference, the Cairo programme of Action is detailed in its analysis, specific in its objective, precise in its recommendation and transparent in its methodology.

In Chapter VII of the Programme of Action, it was recognized that there is an increase in the spread of violence against women particularly domestic violence, rape and many harmful practices meant to control women's sexually and this has led to great suffering of such women, the issue of genital mutilation in particular was mentioned and condemned because it is a violation of a basic right of women and a major life long risk to women's reproductive health (Report of the ICPD). The conference called on member States to ensure that laws addressing such issues are enacted where they do not exist and

such laws be made explicit, strengthened and enforced. Steps to eliminate such practices should include strong community outreach and action should include village and religious heads. Another important issue addressed in this document is the issue of marital violence such as rape, battery and high incidence of sexually transmitted disease which is linked to the high risk sexual behaviour of some spouses. It is stated that such infected women suffer physically and psychologically because such diseases are usually hidden and difficult to diagnose and the health consequences include risk of infertility and ectopic pregnancies. It was further stated that reproductive right is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and sexual reproductive rights should be freed of violence. The programme of action recognised the effect of the socio-economic climate on violence against women. It is then stated, that all Social and Economic Policies are fully responsive to the diverse and changing needs and rights of the families. It was further stated that for any sustainable human development, all cultural, legal and social impediments that hinder the empowerment of women and prevent them from improving their health, social economic and political status which is important for sustainable development must be removed and that preventive and rehabilitative steps must be taken to help the victims of violence.

It was reiterated that violence against women should not be lumped together with violence generally, making it appear insignificant and non-existence.

World Summit for Social Development (WSSD)

Between March 6 - 12, 1995, a world summit was held in Copenhagen Denmark. The goal of the conference was poverty eradication. At the end of the conference, the States endorsed the World Summit Declaration and Programme of Action wherein employment was recognized as the core issue in policy formulation in reducing poverty. This fact has an implication for women because of the relationship it has with the issue of violence. It is recognized that the human, economic and social

costs arising from unemployment — a cause of poverty are enormous. The human cost include destruction of personal dignity, self confidence, damage to health and family life and the anger and frustration of unemployment can lead to violence and substance abuse, crime or suicide (Obateru, 1994). There is no doubt that women are mostly affected by unemployment and its consequences. On the economic cost, it is clear that unemployment is one of the principal causes of severe pressure on government budget and inequity and this is effect may result indirectly in violence against women and have consequences in areas such a hiring, job assignment, wages, promotion career development and other related issues.

World Women Conference (WWC)

The last major conference organised by the United Nations in the first mid decade of the 1990s was the World Conference on Women. It was held in September, 1995 in Beijing China. At the end of the conference which witnessed the largest number of women at a World Conference a document known as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace was adopted. The document is aimed at accelerating the implementation of the Nairobi forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women, the goals of Nairobi were inter-linked with the objectives of Beijing. The Beijing conference was aimed at removing all obstacles that hinder women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life. One of the critical areas of concern which is regarded as an area that must be urgently addressed is the issue of violence against women. It is stated in the Beijing document that one of the ways to build a sustainable, just and developed society is to see to the advancement of women through elimination of all forms of violence. The issue of violence against women was extensively discussed in the document and it is seen as an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace which all governments should address (Para 113-131, Chapter 4).

Strategies for Action: From Rhetoric to Reality

Violence against women is a recurring issue interlinked with development of any nation. The various documents endorsed by the government at the different conferences especially areas dealing with the elimination of violence against women, by themselves will not bring about a change. They are merely tools that can be used to hold the government accountable to the commitment made at the conferences. Most of the world community have responded to the need to eliminate violence against women and a strong wave of change is visibly underway. Therefore, there is hope for a change in Nigeria. However, bearing in mind, that change is a slow process that requires commitment and persistence the following strategies from a multidimensional perspective are suggested to eliminate violence against women in Nigeria.

(i) There must be basic policy changes for any real and lasting solution to the issue of violence against women. Therefore all policies including policies on housing, employment, health, education, environmental should be linked to women because of the special relationship, such policies have with the issue of violence. All the visions at the various conferences will remain a mirage until this issue is no longer seen as women's problem, but as a global and developmental problem and of great concern to the society as a whole. It is suggested that in government policies women issues should be centralized to enable proper analysis on violence against women in its right perspective. The setting aside of section 24 to women issues in Agenda 21 was a great achievement for better understanding and easy references.

(ii) So long as any action to eliminate violence is not proceeded by the launching of activities designed to inform the entire community and arouse the

awareness of the problem, the problem is hardly likely to disappear. There is a need for national awareness programmes on the nature, types, the causes and effects of violence against women. This can be done by raising campaigns on television, radio, prints, drama and even town criers. Information as to where reports of violence against women can be given apart from police stations should be given.

(iii) There should be provision for official machineries such as tribunals, women centres, designed and supported to facilitate rehabilitation programmes for women victims of violence. The tribunals are to oversee progress on women rights and act on complaints of violence.

(a) Specialised female agents and police women trained for such sensitive issues should be at such centres. This idea is in operation in Mauritania where a Ministry of Women's Rights and Family Affairs has been set up. In Mexico, Argentina, and Pakistan, there are provisions for special female agents and police women to deal with sexual assault cases. Niger created centres throughout the country for the education and promotion of women. China established committees at all government level for the protection of women and children. The new South Africa established a sub-council on the status of women to work with the executive council in preparing the new constitution of the country. Nigeria took a bold step in 1995, when the Federal Government created a ministry for women. It is however, suggested that this

ministry should be functional. Such a ministry should deal with all issues relating to women to ensure coordination of all aspects relating to women. It should be informed of all plans and schemes on all women issues, to enable the ministry follow up such issues in the relevant ministries.

(b) Furthermore, women centres should be opened in Nigeria where victims of violence can seek help and redress. This will also enable the government to see cases of violence as real and not an illusion. In England, the stories of some women victims of domestic violence published in a book (Pizzey) led to the reports prepared by two committees of the House of Commons in response to the stories and this led to the enactment of the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Acts in England (1976). In Bangladesh and France there are projects supported by the government to provide shelter and legal assistance for battered women. The Ministry for Women in Nigeria should take a cue from such projects.

(iv) A law however, perfect cannot be effective unless everyone is aware of it, and understands its content, particularly those whom such laws seeks to protect. It is therefore important that, awareness programmes should be organised for women. They should be educated about their rights in their various dialects and in simple language without technicality. The scope, causes,

consequences of violence against women and the rights of women may be presented in very practical and easily accessible booklets, and in drama form for assimilation of gender awareness. Furthermore, women should be sensitized at the grassroot on the dangers of overdependence. Awareness programmes should be developed to encouraging learning of new skills, new technology and improvement of self confidence. Such groups of women's should organize themselves to enable them participate more in village activities, so that they can be reckoned with. This will eventually bring about changes in laws which brings violence against women. The awareness programme should include national training of personnel such as police, judges, doctors, social workers on how to handle issues on violence.

(v) Nigeria should endeavour to rectify all relevant conventions that pertain to women. Although Nigeria is a signatory to the convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women, strict compliance is not given to the provisions of the Convention. The Law Ref-orm Commission should accelerate the evolution of the national legislation and machinery for establishing non discriminatory law. The laws eliminating violence against women must be enacted, implemented and enforced.

(vi) An act does not change overnight, the mental attitude that has existed for several centuries in a society. For women victims of violence to seek redress in Nigeria through the appropriate machinery, specific laws have to be enacted on violence against women to make them punishable offences. See the 1976 Act in England. In Bangladesh, there is also a specific legislation on

cruelty to women (1993). Moreover, specific provisions may be inserted in the Penal and Criminal Codes making sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women punishable. It should be realized that the commitments by Nigeria, by endorsing the different Declarations have special significance only when they are carried out through national laws.

(vii) There must be critical examination and review of some personal laws based on social and cultural practices of ethnic and religious group that result in violence against women. All these laws must be reviewed to conform with the programme of action of all the conferences. It is recognised that violence embedded in religious practices and social customs over the years may be difficult to eliminate, however, with the involvement of religious and community leaders and the realization that it was possible in other countries, elimination of violence against women can become a reality in Nigeria.

(viii) In addition, women must be brought into the midstream of development and must be involved in economic, social, cultural and political decision making. The population of women must be increased as technical adviser managers, planners to bring about a change. Women must be strategically placed especially at this critical time when women are striving to ensure that legislative agenda give priority to an important issue such as violence. This has already been established in Zimbabwe, Senegal, Cameroon and Gambia. Women must therefore be placed in major areas of education, legal and finance to overcome constitutional, legal, administrative, cultural, behavioural, social and economic obstacles. It is

- therefore advocated that there must be a more equitable representation of women.
- (ix) Another strategy is to deeply involve the media in the elimination of violence against women. This should involve every aspect of the media and the role of the media should be preventive in approach.
 - (x) Violence against women must be a joint effort of all persons and groups in the Nation. The implementation of all these strategies to eliminate violence against women can only be achieved with the contribution from various groups. This will include: religious groups, youth organisations, labour organisations, medical and all professional organisations, social service groups and most especially the non governmental organisations.
 - (xi) The Federal Office of Statistics of Nigeria must develop a gender sensitive data bases and funds should be made available for sex disaggregated data.
 - (xii) There should be a follow-up monitoring agency to assess the progress made by any nation to eliminate violence against women. It should be mandatory that the country should be made to give a report to the United Nations who should ensure compliance by a mechanism. Reputable women groups should endeavour to establish linkage relevant United Nations bodies. This would put the government on check that the records are being monitored by the United Nations on efforts to eliminate violence. For example, UNICEF is the undisputed lead agency in the United Nations system in coordinating follow up action of the World Summit for Children. It is suggested that periodic summary of progress report of each country on action taken so

far on violence against women should be made available by such agency established for the purpose. The agency will be in charge of coordination, follow-up and preparation of progress report. This should not be limited to the International level alone but should start from the local government level to the States and finally to the Federal Level where such reports would be collated for onward transmission to the specified agency.

- (xiii) No matter how worthy a programme of action is, adequate funding is required to implement the plans. Without funds it is virtually impossible to effect real and lasting change. The training of Staff, the building of shelters and centres would involve funds. Funding however, will have to be multisource. The government should not be left alone to fund such project but private foundation, non governmental organisations, international funding agencies and private individuals would have to be involved in the funding.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that violence against women in Nigeria is a problem that needs urgent attention. The problem is a barrier to national development, directly or indirectly because it does not enable women to contribute meaningful to national development. The more secured women are from violence and other abuses, the more their energy and creativity will be freed to contribute to development. Continued violence on the other hand could rebound on a country's economic and social development for decades to come. With a spot light turned on the problem by well organised women groups, non governmental organisations and the combined efforts of other members of the society in general, it is possible that Nigeria will be able to achieve a degree of progress on eliminating violence against women.

It is the continued advocacy after the major conferences of the United Nations in the half decade of the 1990s, that violence against women must be eliminated. The monitoring of the programme to action, the implementation of its content, will ultimately bring social changes that will improve the lives of women and enhance their quality of life. However, no matter how laudable the goals of these conferences may be, and how zealous the women groups are, there cannot be a change without the will of a creative, courageous, transparent and accountable government, who will see and at the same time appreciate the importance and effects of these documents on a nation.

As rightly stated by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1946, "Against Odds, Women Inch Forward" (Sivard, 1995).

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